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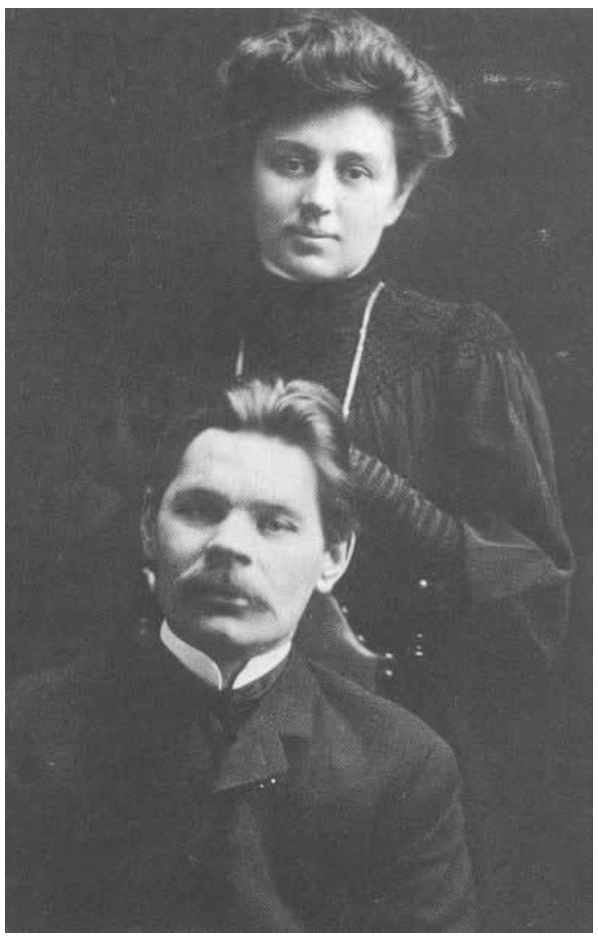
A.NOLEN

Assaulting Mt. Helicon: Writing and Current Affairs.

monthly archives: SEPTEMBER 2013

COURAGE



Maxim Gorky and wife, Maria Andreyeva

A while back I was contacted by a man who claimed to know Alfred Barkov, a literary enthusiast who I wrote about here.

The gentleman said that he knew Barkov from Kiev in the 1990s and that Barkov used to be a KGB colonel– something I was never aware of, if true– and that he could tell me more about his friendship with the late writer. I suggested he read my posts on the meaning of M&M before he share anything and I never heard from him again.

If you'd like to read about my interpretation of *Master and Margarita,* take a gander at Master and Margarita and Is the Devil a German?

I'm writing about this now because it occurred to me that Alfred Barkov's interpretation of the book– that it is a secret exposé of writers' maltreatment at the hands of Gorky and Maria Andreyeva– is incredibly specific, even myopic. In Barkov's own words:

> *It should be noted that the traditional interpretation of* The Master and Margarita *ignores the facts delineating the true Bulgakov's intention. The novel turned out to be a bitter satire aimed at the Soviet repressive regime. It depicts V. Lenin as devil Woland who brought disaster to Russia. The satirical characters of Master and Margarita do not depict Bulgakov and his third wife as it is traditionally believed. The Master represents the odious figure of M. Gorky, whom the Soviet regime officially endowed with the functions of supervising the whole literary process in the Soviet Russia.*
>
> *The image of Margarita reflects the odious figure of unofficial Gorky's wife Maria Andreyeva, a myrmidon of V. Lenin. It was on Lenin's demand that Maria Andreyeva involved gifted writer M. Gorky into the Bolshevik's activities. That very situation has been satirically described in* The Master and Margarita*.*
>
> *A more detailed analysis of the multiple reflections pointing to Lenin, Gorky and Andreyeva as being depicted as Woland, the Master, and Margarita has been presented in my earlier book* Mikhail Bulgakov's Novel The Master and Margarita: a New Approach*.*
>
> *Should the true content of* The Master and Margarita *be disclosed in the thirties, Mikhail Bulgakov most certainly would have been executed.*

Lenin, Gorky and Andreyeva. Very specific. Barkov was a fan of M&M, and if he was KGB too, it would explain why he'd be reluctant to read Bulgakov's criticism of the regime as widely as I do.

But, if what Barkov says is right, that most of the book is a lie designed to hide the truth underneath and that we only need to look at the play within a play or 'menippeah', then a lot of content gets thrown away. Would a great artist ever waste an opportunity to communicate with his audience? Would Bulgakov *throw away* story-telling opportunities like the Master's novel on Pilate, the writers' canteen or Woland's theatrical fiasco? I don't think so. These elements mean something, even if they can't be tied to historical persons. To understand the meaning behind M&M, you must look at how all of the pieces fit together. I don't think there can be much disagreement about the greater meaning of the work if you look at it as a perfect whole.

The Master's attitude to his novel, a novel that tells the truth in a time of lies, parallels Pilate's attitude toward Christ. Neither Pilate nor The Master behave with courage, however, they do what they can to make the best of their cowardice.

The Master heroically writes his history of Pilate, but then burns the manuscript and symbolically disowns his work by checking himself into a mental hospital.

As for Pilate, who says it better than Bulgakov himself?

> *There was as much free time as they needed, and the storm would come only towards evening, and cowardice was undoubtedly one of the most terrible vices. Thus spoke Yeshua Ha-Nozri. No, philosopher, I disagree with you: it is the most terrible vice!*
>
> *He, for example, the present procurator of Judea and former tribune of a legion, had been no coward that time, in the Valley of the Virgins, when the fierce German had almost torn Rat-slayer the Giant to pieces. But, good heavens, philosopher! How can you, with your intelligence, allow yourself to think that, for the sake of a man who has committed a crime against Caesar, the procurator of Judea would ruin his career?*
>
> *'Yes, yes…' Pilate moaned and sobbed in his sleep. Of course he would. In the morning he still would not, but now, at night, after weighing everything, he would agree to ruin it. He would do everything to save the decidedly innocent, mad dreamer and healer from execution!*
>
> *`Now we shall always be together,'[2] said the ragged wandering philosopher in his dream, who for some unknown reason had crossed paths with the equestrian of the golden spear. `Where there's one of us, straight away there will be the other! Whenever I am remembered, you will at once be remembered, too! I, the foundling, the son of unknown parents, and you, the son of an astrologer-king and a miller's daughter, the beautiful Pila.'*
>
> *[2]. Now we shall always be together: Yeshua'swords are fulfilled in the Nicene Creed: '… one Lord Jesus Christ … who was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate…' – words repeated countless times a day for nearly two thousand years in every liturgy or mass. Later in the novel, Pilate will say that nothing in the world is more hateful to him than 'his immortality and his unheard-of fame'. {Translator's Note, full text here.}*

Those four paragraphs are what M&M is about. Immanuel Kant, the "restless old sage" from Bezdomnie's first meeting with Woland, believed that the highest attainment of the human intellect was to share ideas, a 'meeting of minds'. If one believes that the purpose of life is to better oneself, or achieve one's fullest potential, any frustration of that goal is the ultimate betrayal– it's demonic. And there are so many ways to frustrate: intentionally misleading readers like Berlioz encourages Bezdomnie to do; not saying what you mean like the MASSOLIT literary critics; preoccupation with vanities at the expense of important things as shown by Bos'n George and the patrons of Archibald Archibaldovich; or, crowning it all, Pilate's subservience to the machine of state. It takes courage to do what is right and cowardice is the worst of vices.

The Master's failure to stand by his work makes his contribution imperfect; Pilate tries to right the wrong done to Christ by murdering Judas/exposing Kaifa/patronizing Matthew. These acts are Pilate's attempt regain what he cheated himself out of. Both The Master and Pilate have shown half-courage, thus they deserve peace, not heaven.

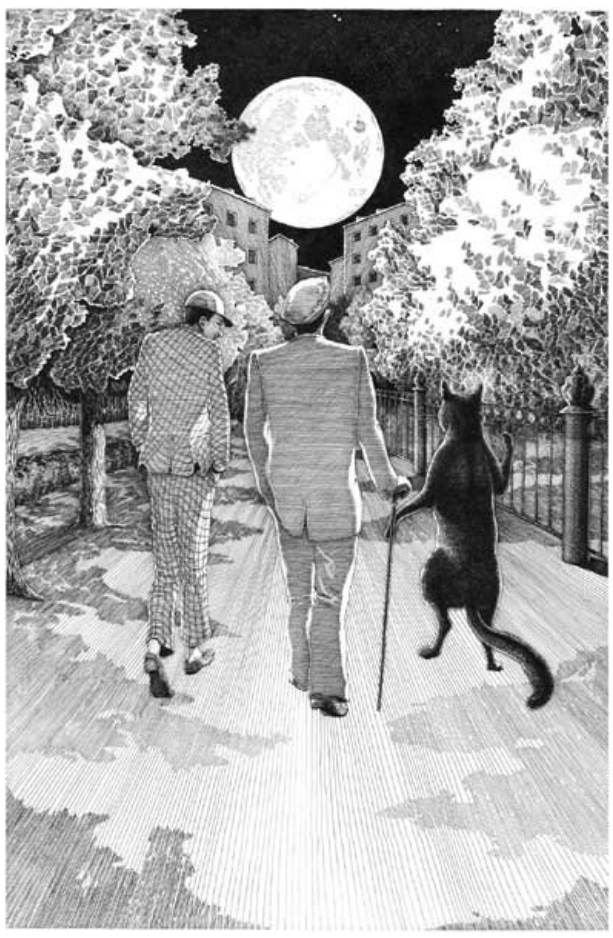
Now, I can come to these conclusions without throwing away any part of M&M. In fact, I believe that every step of the narrative leads unswervingly to this point. So it may very well be that Bulgakov hid the biography of Gorky and his twisted wife in amongst this narrative, but Gorky and his wife are not the be-and-end-all. I also propose, *a la* Keats, that great writers don't bring in gods where gods aren't needed. Bulgakov 'spoke' through the voice of the devil, Woland, because he has addressing issues of eternal significance.

Take home: write honestly, or you're just part of the problem.

Next time: the parallel between Pilate and the Master leads to a parallel between Margarita and Pilate's loyal dog, Banga. Perhaps this is the best place to look for the ghost of Gorky's cat-killing bitch of a wife!

LEAVE A COMMENT

LONG NEEDLES



Thank you to manuscriptsdontburn.org

Lyubov Belozerskaya-Bulgakova was Mikhail Bulgakov's second wife– second of three– and was with him during his 'favored' years. She wrote a book about her life with him shortly after *The Master and Margarita* was published for the first time in the USSR.

I expected this book to be a hatchet job on Bulgakov's character, you know, bitter ex cheated out of a life of fame by a selfish, callous husband… yada yada. Not so. Belozerskaya-Bulgakova is preoccupied with drawing connections between their married life and details of *The Master and Margarita*; she does this so often it feels a bit labored. However, she also throws in interesting vignettes from their day-to-day life.

As twilight settles on freedom of conscience, privacy and political liberty *globally*, it's worth reminding ourselves about the topsy-turvy world Soviet intellectuals lived in during the 1920s. The following excerpt is taken in full, as you would read it on p. 26 of Lyubov's book *if* the book is still in your local library. Politics makes strange bedfellows.

> *"One fine evening"– that is how all stories begin– one unfine evening someone knocked at the door of our Dovecote. (We had no bell.) To my question "Who is it?" came the brisk voice of our landlord: "It's me, bringing you some guests."*
>
> *Two men in civilian clothes stood on the threshold: one with a pince-nez, and one who was just short– Investigator Slavkin and his assistant, with a search warrant. The landlord was along as a witness. Bulgakov wasn't home and I got worried: how was he going to react to the arrival of these "guests"?*
>
> *So I asked them not to start the search without the master of the house being present, and said that the would be arriving shortly.*
>
> *Everybody came into the room and sat down. The landlord lounged in the armchair in the middle. He had a very strong personality, and unrestrained language, especially after a glass or two. Silence. But unfortunately it didn't last long.*
>
> *"Have you heard the joke." began the landlord… (Lord, let this pass, I thought.)*
>
> *"This Jew is standing on Lubianka Square and a passer-by asks him: 'Do you know where the National insurance [Gosstrakh, as abbreviated in Russian, with strakh meaning fear by itself] is?'*
>
> *'I don't know about the National Insurance, but the National Horror [gosuzhas, a reference to the Lubianka Prison] is right here.'"*
>
> *The joke teller shakes with laughter. I manage a feeble smile. Slavkin and his assistant remain silent. The silence continues– then suddenly a familiar knock.*
>
> *I rushed to the door and whispered to Mikhail Afanasievich {M. A. Bulgakov}:*
>
> *"Don't get upset Maka, they're doing a search."*
>
> *But he remained perfectly cool then (he began to twitch much later). Slavkin worked on the book shelves. The "pince-nez" began turning over the arm chairs and poking them with long needles.*
>
> *And then the unexpected occurred. M. A. said:*
>
> *"Well, Lyuba, if they shoot up your chairs I'm not going to be held responsible." (I'd bought these old chairs at a warehouse for confiscated furniture, for three rubles fifty a piece.)*
>
> *Laughter overcame us. Perhaps it was nervous.*
>
> *Near morning the yawning landlord asked:*

> *"Why can't you comrades transfer your activities to the daytime hours?"*
>
> *No one answered him. As soon as they found* Heart of a Dog *and the diaries on the shelf the "guests" left.*
>
> Heart of a Dog *was only returned two years later, at Gorky's insistence…*
>
> *Once two men came to the Dovecote. They were both tall, but very different. One was younger than we, the other was much older. The young dark man had dark dreamy eyes, sharp features and a haughty expression. He stooped, in the posture usual for those with weak chests, inclined to tuberculosis. It was difficult to guess his nationality: Georgian, Jewish, Romanian, perhaps Hungarian? The other man was dressed in the usual uniform of those days, a peasant shirt, and looked like a smart engineer.*
>
> *They turned out to be from the Vakhtangov Theater. The younger one was the actor Vasily Vasilievich Kuza (he died during the bombing, in the first days of the war); the older one was the director Alexei Dmitrievich Popov. They wanted M. A. to write a comedy for the theater.*

The resulting play was *Zoya's Apartment*, a dark work about a gambling den that reflected poorly on the government but was immensely popular. Eventually the play was banned.

If Bulgakov had been a mediocre talent writing what he wrote, he wouldn't have been published/performed anywhere. It is much harder to silence someone who people will risk their necks to read– dissident authors who entertain have to be shut up with golden handcuffs, which is how Stalin and the Moscow Art Theater trapped M. A. in the end.

LEAVE A COMMENT

LEAVE A COMMENT

THE SANDBOX

"Hi, Mom!"

The Middle East is no place for a single, Western woman, as anybody who has spent real time there knows. It's not just sexual harassment. (Thanks in large part to Hollywood and Western TV, most of the world thinks Western women are easy and 'justified' targets of aggression.) Middle Eastern cultural and religious attitudes– even in more 'progressive' states– mean there are very few job opportunities for Western women, outside of US/European government-funded entities. Fact of life.

So it's weird– REALLY weird– to find a single, white, female photographer bopping around a Middle Eastern war zone. In fact, I'd wager any time you find a single, white, female doing fourth estate work in the Middle East, you're not getting the full story about their employer(s). That's not a comment on women's competence, that's a reflection on the political realities of the world we all live in.

In light of that political reality, I was interested to find this article from *The Weekly Standard*, printed June 12th 2013. Clearly, the aim of the article is to discredit Laura Poitras *along the lines of* 'working with the enemy against the interests of the United States'. (Sound familiar?)

Read the full story here, but in a nutshell, one soldier claims Poitras was filming an attack on US troops with foreknowledge of the attack, and she did nothing to stop it. Gross behavior if true.

> *According to* Devil's Sandbox*, Poitras met with three commanding U.S. Army officers two days after the ambush: "The [Brigade Commander] turned to Laura Poitras and ask her if she had seen and filmed the attack on his men. Ditto's platoon had reported seeing windows taped around Adhamiya, a sure sign that the local civilians knew of the ambushes in advance. The fact that the shops were all secured, gates were locked, and nobody was out on the streets that morning also strongly indicated that the locals had foreknowledge of the engagements. The [Brigade Commander] and Major Warington wanted to know if Poitras had advance knowledge of the attacks. It stood to reason that she did, because she was living with Doctor Aladhadh's family in the middle of one of the kill zones."*
>
> *Bruning, who was not embedded with the 2nd Battalion but conducted numerous interviews with the troops who were, told me Tuesday night that Doctor Riyadh Aladhadh, the main subject of Poitras's documentary, "was strongly suspected of being one of the key insurgent leaders for the Sunni insurgency of that particular district of Baghdad."*

Wow, so a Western, single, working woman was roomies with a "Dr.", who in turn was a leader of the "Sunni insurgency". Gets better.

> *During her November 22 meeting with Army officers, Poitras denied that she had been on the rooftop, and the two U.S.*

> *soldiers who saw the woman on the rooftop failed to positively identify her, so she was let go, according to the book. Bruning told me Tuesday night that if the commanding officer had known for sure she was on the roof, "he would have arrested her right there on the spot."*
>
> *Bruning claims in his book that Poitras later admitted to him in an email that she had in fact been on the roof that day. Bruning revealed for the first time to THE WEEKLY STANDARD on Tuesday night that he provided a copy of the email to a U.S. soldier, who in turn contacted U.S. law enforcement, which allegedly led to a Joint Terrorism Task Force investigation. "That triggered a JTTF investigation in New York," Bruning told me. "The JTTF guys flew out here. They interviewed me. They interviewed the guys from the platoon. I turned over all the documentation I had."*

No charges were ever brought against Poitras. Instead, the MacArthur Foundation gave her a genius grant.

> *"The fact that she was standing there with [Aladhadh], the guy who everybody suspected was responsible for orchestrating the attack and had been living with him was proof enough for everybody in [Battalion] 2-162 to believe that she had foreknowledge," Bruning said. "It just defied all logic that she wouldn't have known it was coming."*
>
> *THE WEEKLY STANDARD tried to contact Poitras through the Freedom of the Press Foundation on Tuesday but did not receive a response.*

If the information in *Devil's Sandbox* is true, John McCormack, Ms. Poitras was not there to fight with "Sunnis" against US soldiers. She was there as part of some twisted psy-ops plan, making documentaries to manipulate public opinion. I mean, given the revelations she helped Snowden make, does anybody really believe that the NSA/CIA/GCHQ didn't know where Ms. Poitras was and what she was doing? *Really?* No charges pressed against her, when back in the Anglosphere citizens get hosed for intemperate tweeting? *Really, really?*

The second most interesting thing about this *Weekly Standard* article is Ms. Poitras' description of how Edward Snowden contacted her with regards to the PRISM (etc.) leaks. From her interview with *Salon*:

> *He told me he'd contacted me because my border harassment meant that I'd been a person who had been selected. To be selected –and he went through a whole litany of things — means that everything you do, every friend you have, every purchase you make, every street you cross means you're being watched.* ***"You probably don't like how this system works, I think you can tell the story."*** *… Of course I was suspicious, I worried that it was entrapment, it's crazy, all the normal responses you have to someone reaching out making, claims. He said he'd seen a piece that I'd done on Bill Binney in the Times.*

Naivety on Edward's part? Or making the best of an impossible situation? (If I was asked: *Which media member do you trust to out the most egregious civil liberty abuses in our time?* my answer would be 'none', so maybe Ed's choice is smarter than Laura's background suggests. A lot of info *has* got out.) Wouldn't it be funny if Snowden used a CIA honey-trap to out one of the worst government abuses in living memory? Funny till the giant finds his feet, that is.

Laura only agreed to give her *Salon* interview AFTER the magazine printed this glowing piece on her. Read the full interview here, but be prepared for a lot of "no comment" and caginess. Appelbaum might want to take a page out of Laura's book, because what she doesn't say won't come back to haunt her later. Wink, nudge. (I wonder if she answered questions from behind her fingers, *a la* James Angleton?)

A final take-home from all this is that William Binney is propaganda gold. He's respected, articulate, has the background to make informed statements on the surveillance state AND is a patriot. Read his take on Snowden here and here. If Binney can't be bought, expect a lot of mud to be slung at him in the future.

The circus continues. More importantly, Congress is back! Follow US legislation regarding Snowden's leaks at govtrack.us, under Intelligence activities, surveillance, classified. The website will tell you how to contact representatives, provide bill content and status updates. You only need to provide an email address to register. Take away the money.

Wanna learn more about Laura and Jacob? Try this and this.

2 COMMENTS

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE SLEEPING WELL, MR. APPELBAUM?

Mr. Jacob Appelbaum, representative of the Navy-funded Tor Network, spoke on behalf of Edward Snowden during the 2013 Whistleblower Award ceremony on Aug 31st. The ceremony took place in Berlin, and was organized by the German chapter of the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms (IALANA).

Laura Poitras, who put Snowden in contact with Appelbaum, was also in the crowd.

I'm left with a lot of questions.

Why is Appelbaum, an American with DoD ties and a tenuous link to Snowden, addressing this German-speaking crowd? Couldn't IALANA find a German-speaking human rights activist to read Mr. Snowden's message? At the very least, why didn't Laura Poitras read Snowden's message herself? Why this persistent promotion of Appelbaum, Laura?

Is the IALANA acceptance speech an attempt to manufacture a meaningful connection between Snowden and Appelbaum now that Putin has tied Snowden's hands? (Don't disparage Russia's American buddies!) Why is Appelbaum's weak link to Snowden always trotted out on a German stage?

Previously, the NSA's damage control has been championed by hot-headed journalists and muddle-headed shills– with friends like these the NSA doesn't need enemies. But thanks to Mr. Putin, times are changing. To this blogger, Appelbaum smells like part of a more professional containment operation.

And, I dare say, Appelbaum smells like that to Snowden too. Here is a transcript of the beginning of Appelbaum's "2013 Whistleblower Award" acceptance speech (which he made on behalf of Edward).

> *When I spoke with Edward Snowden this evening, he wanted me to convey a message to you, which I will read, but he also wanted me to not talk too much about geopolitics, and not to talk too much about all of the things which everybody else has already said this evening.*
>
> *And instead, he wanted me to talk about individuals, to talk about people. He wanted me to talk about hope for change. And this reminded me of something that one of the greatest American whistle blowers to ever live is famous for saying, that is Daniel Ellsberg, he said that "Courage is contagious." And I see here in the audience a number of people who embody that, Laura [Poitras] being the clear winner of that so far.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *It seems important to say that Edward Snowden is a person of high moral character, I can't really imagine a person who would be better fitting for this award, not just this year, but almost any year. That isn't to forget about Chelsea Manning, that isn't to say other people haven't done great service for humanity.*
>
> ***But when I spoke with him [Snowden] this evening, his first question wasn't about how things would go but he asked me if I had slept. He asked me how I was feeling, and, uh, I told him that I was fine. And he said, "Are you sure?"***
>
> *This is a person who really cares about other people, a person who while he as been attacked and relentlessly smeared by the propaganda machines, he is a person who has thrown himself onto the gears of that very machine. And he has done it for each and every one of us and I can't actually believe that it is true in some sense, because it just seems so incredibly powerful, so passionate and so beautiful.*

Snowden doesn't seem to think that by talking to Appelbaum, he's in danger of crossing Putin's 'red line' about harming the USA. (I believe Putin's red lines are for real.) Snowden also thinks that Appelbaum needs coaching about what to say, because Appelbaum might otherwise take Snowden's message down an unhelpful track.

Perhaps most importantly, Snowden thinks Appelbaum may have an uneasy conscience. Are you sure you feel fine, Jacob? Really?

Of course, all of this makes Jacob Appelbaum laugh nervously. *Wow, German-speaking crowd*, says the Tor-Keeper, *isn't Snowden a great guy? He cares about how I feel. Moving swiftly on…*

Jacob can join Mr. Putin, and the handful of die-hard NSA shills, in having difficulty wrapping his head around Ed Snowden's motives. Appelbaum can keep repeating how he spoke– in person– to Mr. Snowden before the ceremony. He can keep throwing love to his sugar-mommy. He can keep preaching to Germans with his crystal-clear diction. (I don't remember Jacob's careful enunciation from previous speeches. Somebody been to Toastmasters?)

But what Appelbaum can't do is pull his head out of the wilderness

of mirrors, because he was born and bred there. And maybe that's the best way to out a spy. They don't understand loyalty to anything beyond their chain of command. *What's in it for Edward?* they ask, rolling their eyes and shaking their heads. S*trange guy!* shout the Americans.

When Edward Snowden outed the NSA's massive domestic spying capabilities, and its cooperation with other governments, he did a very important thing. He gave everybody the chance to correct government excesses that have been spiraling out of control for a very long time.

Since the start of Snowden's revelations, intelligence agencies everywhere have tried to either benefit from Snowden's actions, or contain the damage his actions caused. The best way to achieve EITHER goal is to plant an agent close to Snowden in order to spin his message. There are a lot of creepy guys and gals crowding around Snowden and that's not Snowden's fault. Appelbaum is one of the "gears" chewing up Ed; a price Ed knew he'd have to pay for exposing massive government corruption.

Will the next volley of attempts to assassinate Snowden's character come from Poitras herself, or from Appelbaum? Come on kids, Putin's got Ed's hands held back. Somebody throw the punch.

Oh yeah, what are you gonna do with all that MacArthur money, Laura?

2 COMMENTS

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Tweets

RT @dgolumbia: P. Zimbardo is very weird (see anolen.com/2014/11/16/the…), but important to find boys preferring porn to women, etc. http://t.c… 3 days ago

@CUEwindsearch @rebrandingtime from Wiki on Rall: Rall's cartoons have appeared regularly in Rolling Stone, Time, Fortune and Men's Health 3 days ago

@CUEwindsearch @rebrandingtime stinks to high heaven. It's a logistical nightmare to plan trips to these regions, let alone broadcasting. 3 days ago

@CUEwindsearch @rebrandingtime cut to drift... that's original. I'll be good to see where they turn up next... Kyiv Post? :) 3 days ago

@CUEwindsearch @sarahcuda @rebrandingtime typical spook response to criticism. 3 days ago

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